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## How to Take in a Jeans Waist

The Gap. No, not the store. The OTHER Gap. The one at the back of your jeans' waistband. The gap you overlooked in the fitting room because the jeans fit *so well* on the rest of your body (and because you forgot to sit down while trying them on). You can sew, so no big deal—let's just take them in! Here's a method I used to take in a too big jeans waist when I worked as an alterations shop seamstress. Ready to save yourself \$25? Gather those supplies!

How to Take in a Jeans Waist – DIY.

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## MATERIALS:

- Big fat heavy duty safety pin
- Pins
- Sewing machine needle (I used a universal 90 needle; size 100 or a special denim needle might be better for a heavier denim)
- Tool to rip seams (I used my thread snips, but a seam ripper is totally acceptable)

- Marking chalk (I prefer a wax tailor's chalk)
  - Measuring tool
  - Hammer or rubber mallet
  - All-purpose thread (we will use this for everything except topstitching)
  - Topstitching thread (find a thread that matches the stitching on the waistband, belt loops, and center back seam of your jeans; jeans/denim thread is your first choice, then heavy-duty, then all-purpose. See tips for success at the end of the tutorial for more information)
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## HOW TO:

Step One: Pin





Put on your jeans and pin the center back seam so that your center topstitching falls to one side. Pull the waistband snug and secure the excess with an extra-large safety pin. Continue to pinch out the excess fabric down the center back seam until there's no more excess left to pin. It may be easier to have another person do this step for you. Whoever pins—be careful not to pin your underwear!





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Take off your jeans and put on some other pants (or don't...I don't!). Carefully mark along the pinned seam on the inside of the jeans. Remove pins. Don't freak out, but it's time to take them apart.

Step Two: Rip



Clip each line of waistband stitching a half inch or so outside of your markings. Jeans are usually sewn with a chain stitch, so be sure to clip the beginning and end of each stitchline you wish to remove. Trust me, pulling out chain stitching is really fun, but you don't want to get too carried away! Go ahead and remove that section of stitching now.



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Remove belt loop(s) at center back. With the interior chain stitches removed, you can clip away the corresponding thread on the outside of the waistband.



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Separate the outer and inner waistband by clipping the stitches at the top of the waistband until you reach your intact chain stitches.



Measure the distance between your waistband markings. Memorize it (or just write it down I guess).



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### Step Three: Sew

Well, not *just* yet. Pull out the waistband marking distance measurement from earlier. I had you pin your jeans so that all the topstitching was to one side because it is was easier and much more accurate than folding between the stitch lines. In order to hide the new waistband seam beneath your belt loop, we need to shift the center of the waistband markings so that it lies exactly between the topstitching lines instead of to one side.

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Above you can see my original waistband markings (where the pins are). In my case, the pins are 2.5" apart. SO, to be truly centered, I must shift them to the right so that each pin is 1.25" from the middle of the old center back stitch lines. I don't bother with actually marking new lines. Instead, I mark a line on the waistband at the true center and then fold the inner waistband *on that line*, right sides together.

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Sew your inner waistband with a seam allowance of *half your marking distance measurement*. For me, this is 1.25". This is really tight quarters for sewing, so I like the pin my desired stitch line and then mark with chalk so I have a visual to sew along.

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Sew, trim (there's not going back now!), press seam allowance open, turn out and admire.

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Take in the outer waistband, using the inner waistband as a guide. Sew, trim, press, turn.

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Now for the seat. Normally I would pin perpendicular to where I plan to sew, but not for this. Pin right sides together, all along your markings from earlier. Turn to the other side to make sure your pins are going through the markings on that side, too.



You'll begin sewing right in the old fold line (where I'm pointing) and curve out, following your pins/markings. You may need to unpick a bit further down to avoid too sharp a transition. Use your hammer to pound the yoke seam you'll be sewing across. There's, what?, eight layers of denim there—so even a little bit of flattening will help. Sew slowly over this area—try to get those seams lined up as perfectly as possible.

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Sew. This is a good time to try your jeans on and make sure there are no funny looking lumps or bumps in your new seat seam. If there are (for me-there usually are), go back and re-do the area that needs work. You can also adjust to better match the yoke seams.

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Once you're happy with the fit of your jeans, serge the excess off (leave enough to accommodate new topstitching—about a half inch). Turn right side out and give your new seat seam a nice press. Hammer at that yoke/seat seam intersection again. You'll be

topstitching through twelve or so layers this time.

Step Four: Finish



Switch to your matching topstitching thread. You can leave all-purpose thread in the bobbin. Sew each line of topstitching from the bottom up, overlapping a few stitches with the old stitch line.

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Clip any loose threads on the waistband and then topstitch—don't forget to hammer out the thick parts. Reattach the belt loop (hammer, hammer, hammer).

- Make sure all your new topstitching overlaps the old the secure the chain stitch ends.
- HAMMER.
- If your jeans are very worn along the seat seam, go at your new seam with a nail file to roughen it up. Be careful of your stitches, though!
- Don't attempt this alteration with your \*favorite\* jeans until you've got a few pair under your belt.
- Don't attempt this alteration after wearing your jeans all day, either. You want to do this to a pair of jeans fresh out of the dryer (or off the line... you get me?).
- When removing the belt loop, clip the threads between the waist band and belt loop. Do NOT pick the threads from the belt loop. When you reattach later, just sew over the original thread still left in the belt loop. This will help disguise your alteration. Trust me.

What are you waiting for? Take off your pants and lose The Gap for good!

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Put your pants back on and Check. Yourself. Out.

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JENN - A JENUINE LIFE SAYS

March 3, 2015 at 7:55 am

AMAZING tutorial, Tasha! Thanks so much for tackling a much-requested alteration!

[Reply](#)



SANDI P SAYS

March 3, 2015 at 10:40 am

Now I can finally wear the jeans I bought online that are way too big around the waist.

Thanks for posting this, even if I mess up its ok, cause I couldn't wear them anyway.

It will make good practice ! Thanks Tasha !

[Reply](#)



ANNE SAYS

March 5, 2015 at 4:36 pm

Awesome!! I hate that gap!! I've got a Craft Gossip post scheduled for this evening that links to your tutorial:

<http://sewing.craftgossip.com/tutorial-take-in-a-jeans-waist-and-get-rid-of-the-gap/2015/03/05/>

-Anne

[Reply](#)



MARY VINCENT SAYS

March 19, 2015 at 9:27 pm

I have taken in regular pants this way, but I've never attempted to take in jeans. The thick cross-seams were intimidating! To misquote Kipling: "You're a better man than I, Gunga Din!"

Reply



CYNDY SAYS

March 30, 2015 at 1:04 am

I am an alteration hand and this explanation is brilliant. Exactly how I alter jeans. Use a jeans needle and careful of pin pricks as the fabric is stiff.

Reply



VIKTORIYA SAYS

June 2, 2015 at 9:56 am

I have actually done the same alteration to my jeans about the same time as this post and it has worked a treat. I didn't do the topstitching but I needed to cut quite a bit down the crotch so it's not so noticeable, at least to me. I have also used this technique to alter the width and length of a jeans jacket.

This tutorial describes it all in great detail.

Reply



KATHRYN SAYS

October 7, 2015 at 5:00 am

Hello, I found your blog post on Pinterest. I have a new pair of jeans, which I love, but every time I wear them they fall down and I'm left with a very unattractive case of what we here in Australia call "builders' crack".

Anyway, no more. I've just followed your excellent and highly reassuring instructions and my jeans now fit. It was a bit scary to cut the material, so the reassuring-ness of your instructions was extra-appreciated.  
So, thank you so much for posting this.

Reply



TRACY SAYS  
October 17, 2015 at 7:03 pm

I sew/alter garments professionally...Hammer the seams to make them flat. Stitching will be easier.

Reply



SUSAN SAYS  
October 23, 2015 at 11:49 pm

I can't wait to try this!

Reply



NAWAL SAYS  
October 30, 2015 at 11:37 am

Vous nous pouvez savoir à quel point vous me rendez service. Merci

Reply



SALLY TAN SAYS

March 5, 2016 at 4:40 pm

how nice of you to give us this tutorial, my daughter inherit the bigger hip problem and this is a constant problem, now I am excited to offer her this better way of solving the problem. thank you a bunch!

[Reply](#)

MKEGAL SAYS

April 9, 2016 at 12:07 am

Thank you! Thank you!! Thank you!!!

I have a horrendous time with this exact problem (fit the hips, the waist is too big).

Now I'll hit the thrift store for a couple pair to practice on, and the next time I find good new pants in the store with The Dreaded Waist Gap, I'll know I can correct the design problem. 😊

Out of curiosity, is it only necessary to alter the center back, or are there butt/thigh shapes which would lead to needing to change the sides or front (either instead of, or in addition to, the center back)?

[Reply](#)

DAVID SAYS

May 6, 2016 at 8:18 pm

What A Fabulous Idea!! Had a similar situation, and, now, I will shape my jeans, sew the fabric, like U showed me, and, re-sew , that is, fix my problem, and, wear my favorite jeans, again!! Thank Y'all!!?.

[Reply](#)

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You did it! For an even better finish, try some of the tips below:

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### TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Really pin as far down the seat as you can. The further down you go, the less noticeable the transition from original thread to DIY topstitching will be.
- Use denim/jeans thread as a first choice. My local shop only had blue in stock, so I found a matching heavy duty thread. If you must use all-purpose thread for a good color match, try running *two* threads through your needle for a chunkier (more original looking) topstitch. Simply wind two bobbins of thread and place both on your vertical spool pin.
- For unusual thread colors, try running two *different* color threads through your needle. I've had good success matching chunky "white" thread by using a heavy weight white or off-white thread with a light blue thread.



BROOKE SAYS  
June 12, 2016 at 6:24 pm

Fabulous tutorial. Altered my daughter's jeans per your instructions and they turned out perfectly! Thanks for the visual deconstructing, all the tips and detailed guide. I used a "hump jump" to get over the bulky seams.

Reply



ANGELA SAYS  
July 24, 2016 at 1:52 am

What model of machine are you using with this jeans. They look thick.

Reply



DAISY COPELAND SAYS  
August 27, 2016 at 11:48 am

THANKS VERY GOOD TUTORIAL.

Reply



NICOLA TREND SAYS  
September 25, 2016 at 5:26 am

Thank you.

[Reply](#)

LIZ SAYS

January 29, 2017 at 2:08 pm

Have seen many but this is by far the best tutorial for taking in the jeans waist. Thank you so very much. Also appreciate the nice tips at the end of the article.

[Reply](#)

JENNA HUNTER SAYS

March 3, 2017 at 6:09 pm

I have put on some weight since I haven't been going to the gym since New Years. Had I kept going to the gym, I would have stayed thin. I was astonished to know that to alter jeans one should clip each line of waistband stitching a half inch or so. I am no expert, so I will be sure to get my jeans altered by a pro so I don't have to buy new ones!

[Reply](#)

LEXI REVELLIAN SAYS

May 7, 2017 at 10:23 am

Thank you for the brilliant step-by-step instructions. I buy men's jeans as I am six foot and slim and women's jeans never fit me, but there's always that gape at the back I have to pull in with a belt. I am not a dressmaker, but have just successfully taken the waist of a pair of men's skinny jeans in 3.5". They now fit perfectly and you wouldn't notice the alteration unless you got very close and peered. Thank you!

[Reply](#)



LINDA CURRY SAYS  
May 11, 2017 at 4:27 am

I found your instructions very useful and ended up doing a reasonable job with my jeans. I found the waistband difficult with all the thicknesses of material but with a bit of hand stitching I tidied it up. Thanks for the step by step advice. At first I thought "I can't do this, it's too complicated". But as I progressed I saw why you did certain things and followed suit. I didn't get any special cotton but a thicker shinier grey would have looked better (my jeans are grey). My usual needle survived and I lifted the presser foot on thick material. The machine clicked it into the new position which surprised me.

Thanks again. Another pair of jeans ready for winter.

[Reply](#)



JULIA SAYS  
June 3, 2017 at 12:12 pm

THANK YOU SO MUCH!! I came out with perfectly altered jeans and finally had the confidence to alter jeans properly! In the past I had done a dart in the back and was super unhappy with it so the result of your tutorial is amazing. Thank you so much for sharing this with the world! Have a wonderful day! x

[Reply](#)



SHARI TRUMBULL SAYS  
October 4, 2017 at 11:21 pm

Thank You soooo much for this helpful stepxstep, Jessica! I'm going to try this on a pair of thinner-denim-material jeggings (I think my machine can handle this denim) that I have and I want to alter them the right way-Looks totally worth the effort! Can't wait to give it a try! ☺ ☺ XO-Shari

[Reply](#)

JENNIFER SAYS  
March 1, 2018 at 12:21 am

Which sewing machine did you use to sew through the 12+ layers of denim? Thx!!

[Reply](#)

TASHA SAYS  
July 12, 2018 at 1:21 pm

When I worked in an alterations shop, I used a Bernina. Now at home, I use an industrial straight stitch.

[Reply](#)

SARAH SAYS  
April 4, 2018 at 2:20 pm

Thanks for this, it really useful and easy to plus follow. I've done a few pair of Jeans now since losing weight. The tip about doubling the top thred is grand I was hunting for thick therd till read that.

Thanks again

[Reply](#)

NATHALIE SAYS

<https://mesewcrazy.com/2015/03/how-to-take-in-a-jeans-waist.html>



April 9, 2018 at 10:03 am

Thanks for the tutorial! I tried this but find I have a funny bump I can't seem to get rid of now. I redid the seat a couple time and just find myself undoing stitching and going lower and lower down, yet I still have a funny bump that resembles a tail. I feel like I must be missing something. Is there a step I should go back to to fix this problem?

[Reply](#)

KAT SAYS

July 7, 2018 at 7:11 pm

THANK YOU for this tutorial! I just altered a pair of jeans that were about 3" too big in the waist, and I am so pleased with the result! I can't believe I haven't been doing this sooner.

I also had the same problem at first with a little tail bump where my seam met up with the original seam in the butt of the jeans...I solved the problem by undoing more of the top stitching further down (about an inch farther) but LEAVING the seam that held the two sides together. I was then able to have more control over the fabric to smooth out a nice curve that blended into the original seam. It took some pulling and adjusting to get the fabric to then fold properly for the top stitching, but the finished product is great!

[Reply](#)

JEAN SAYS

August 13, 2018 at 4:52 am

Thank you very much for the tutorial & pictures. Did this today and it has made such a difference (even the smallest mens jeans need 2" taken out of the waist). My 70's Singer with size 90 needles went through the belt loops just fine.

[Reply](#)



JENNIFER SAYS  
October 15, 2018 at 2:47 pm

Worked like a charm and I took almost 4 inches off the waist. I love my new jeans! Thanks so much!

Reply



EFFY SAYS  
August 17, 2019 at 3:21 am

So glad I ran into this tutorial! Its my first time doing this kind of alteration, so I just followed you word for word, even did the double thread for the top stich, and it worked out perfectly on the very first try! Only issue is that my jeans do not have belt loops, so you can see the seam, but since it's at the back it's not so bad. Thank you so much

Reply



CHRIS SAYS  
May 5, 2020 at 4:10 am

Thanks so much for this clear and simple tutorial! I used it to take in my fiancée's jeans and she is delighted! Can't wait to get onto the next pair. I would definitely advise using needles/thread designed for denim to avoid the frustration of too many breakages – well worth the extra few pounds/dollars!

Reply

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